

SHARING GOD'S LIFE

SHARING GOD'S LIFE – A 2018 LENT COURSE FOR THE DIOCESE OF WINCHESTER

Session 3. Living God's life together (Living)

INTRODUCTION

The leader's role in this session is help people grow their vision of the 'faith community' as a context for Sharing God's Life and 'delighting in his grace'. The image here, from John 7, is of a water channel: each person's Rule of Life supports them in their openness and ability both to receive from and to give to others.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 minutes)

Some suggestions:

LISTEN: Use 'Prayers for Lent' sheet again – making sure everyone can see a copy.

Or listen prayerfully to someone's chosen **piece of music**, ending with the Prayer of Preparation from Common Worship (**CW Main Volume p.168**).

LOOK: Put as many **jugs** as possible (any kind) in the centre of the table, and reflect together on what these might symbolise for Christians. Turn these thoughts into prayers of praise & thanksgiving; pray also for one another as you explore what it means to share God's life together.

WELCOME (10 minutes)

These points will help you grow together on your journey:

LOOKING BACK: Encourage people to reflect together on the last session, on any work they've done on 'Loving God, Loving others, Loving myself or Loving life', and on anything they're putting into practice. If you've memorised Bible verses you'll need to revise them. Ideally everyone will bring their copy of the **Sharing God's Life leaflet**.

HERE & NOW: Try another ice-breaker: for example, 'What signs of spring have you seen today?' (There are more '**Ideas for ice-breakers**' here.)

LOOKING FORWARD: Recap on the overall structure of the course, as explained in the **Participant's Guide**. Today you will be referring to the **Sharing God's Life leaflet** again, focussing on the 'Living' strand of your Rule of Life.

WORD: What does it say? (20 minutes)

Today's Bible reading is John 7:37-39.

Before you come to Scripture, everyone needs to be familiar with the central idea of Sharing God's Life. In this session you'll be focussing on what it means to live this new life together, using another image from John's gospel: being a channel of life-giving water, which represents the Holy Spirit. Here the 'Living' strand of each person's Rule of Life will support both ends of the channel. Explain this to the group before you engage with today's Bible passage.

Try starting with the 90-second **video clip**.

Encourage group members to express their reactions to this animation...

If possible, give everyone a copy of the double-spaced **Bible passage** in two translations – and a **pencil**. Allow a few minutes' silence for each person to reflect on the text, and to mark it in any way they like. (Some may have brought their own Bible, in another translation.) Then invite them to share their thoughts & feelings, either as a whole group or in 2s & 3s.

What does it mean? (30 minutes)

Choose one or two ideas from different sections, leaving plenty of time for the next (WORK) section:

HEAD

- What sort of 'thirst' is Jesus referring to? Does this describe your experience?
- What does it mean to 'come to him and drink'? How do you do this together, whether in your group, or on Sundays, or in other places?
- Describe a person out of whose heart 'rivers of living water' seem to flow... you might like to make a list on a **big sheet of paper**. Now describe a church from which 'rivers of living water' seem to flow. What do they have in common?

HEART

- How spiritually full or empty do people feel? Encourage them to consider why this might be: what replenishes them? what drains them?
- In your church, are people more likely to be like stagnant pools, filled but never overflowing, or reservoirs in drought, in danger of running dry? How does this happen?

HANDS

- Give everyone a piece of **hosepipe** a few inches long and invite them to let it represent their life as a disciple. How well connected are they to the Fountain of Life? What are the helps and hindrances to a stronger connection?
- Spend some time on the **colouring sheet** for this session. Or give everyone the sheet to take home.

HUNCH

- Read the **short piece about water** from Esther de Waal's 'Living with Contradiction', and allow people to reflect on the balance of contemplation and action in their lives.
- Use the *Lectio Divina* approach with **John 7:37-39**. Allow time for reflection; there may not be time for much sharing.

WORK: How does it apply? (10 minutes)

Now is the time for group members to do some more preliminary work on their own Rule of Life, with the examples in the leaflet to prompt them. Don't rush this bit!

INDIVIDUALLY

- Allow time for people to reflect on the examples of 'LIVING' on p.6 of the **Sharing God's Life leaflet**, encouraging them to notice how they're using their time and talents already. Which of the four kinds of

relationship could do with a bit more prayerful attention – Living a rooted life, Living an open life, Living a generous life or Living a shared life? Perhaps they're conscious of the Spirit's prompting...

- The **Discover your Gifts sheet**, which you may have used in Session 1, would also be useful here, as people consider how they might use their gifts to build up the church.

IN 2s OR 3

- It may be helpful to allow the issue of difficult relationships to surface, perhaps by suggesting that people look at the **Bible verses** on the theme of loving one another, encouraging them to share and pray for each other as the Spirit leads.

AS A GROUP

- Discuss how you can enable everyone who belongs to your church to become more and more open both to receiving from and to giving to one another – both when you meet for worship and at other times? How might the ministry of healing be relevant here?

- How do people find their first experience of worshipping with your congregation? Reflect on the 'horizontal' dimension: what helps/hinders them in connecting with other people? And what about the 'vertical' dimension: what helps/hinders them in connecting with God?

- Might the group compose a letter to the incumbent/PCC making some suggestions about how you might share God's life together more fully?

- Memorise a Scripture about sharing God's life together, for example Matthew 10:8: '**Freely you have received; freely give.**' (New International Version)

Before you close, encourage people to make some more jottings in their Participant's Guide, capturing whatever insights and ideas they want to take forward.

CLOSING PRAYER (5 minutes)

Some suggestions:

LOOK: Display one or more of the **pictures of Martha & Mary**, and invite people to reflect on how they might be relevant to the life on your church. They may wish to write, and then read aloud, some brief prayers expressing their response.

LISTEN: Sing, or listen to a recording of, or say together as a prayer, the song '**Make me a channel of your peace**'. Or try the **Circling Prayer**.

DO: Prepare a **jug of water, a large bowl and a big towel**, and invite the group to wash one another's hands (or feet), while you read aloud **John 13:1-17**. Allow a little silence at the end, and close with the Grace.

